

Students learn hotel business on the job

Standing near a "Wet Floor" sign, Howard University hotel management student Forrest Wade, with mop in hand, is learning the hotel business from the bottom up at the Howard University Inn.

"If guests see dirty floors, they wonder what the rooms look like," he said.

Students in Howard's two-year-old hotel/motel management program began practical training, in May, in all aspects of the hospitality business—from housekeeping to accounting.

Thirteen students are receiving firsthand experience as interns for eight weeks this summer at the 150-room, full-service hotel on Howard's main campus. One other student is interning at a local Holiday Inn.

In 1982, Howard joined a growing number of colleges and universities around the nation that have two- and four-year hotel programs. However, only a few

schools have their own hotels.

"Much of the knowledge and skills needed for successful hotel, motel and restaurant management must be learned on the job," says Dr. Gadis Nowell, program coordinator.

The last two years of the four-year Howard hotel curriculum, which is based in the university's School of Business and Public Administration, require extensive practical experience working in a hotel or other hospitality facilities.

Students are expected to complete 1,200 man-hours, or 30 weeks, of one-the-job training, according to Samuel E.K. Avor, internship coordinator. The training is stretched out over the course of the four years leading to a bachelor's degree in business administration.

Wade, a 19-year old sophomore from San Jose, California, notes that the internship enables him to understand and appreciate the importance of the various hotel jobs.

Students in the hotel program's first internships are working on a weekly rotation schedule at the Howard University Inn. They are assuming duties in accounting, housekeeping, maintenance and engineering, as well as in food production.

They are working in the hotel's front office, coffee shop, restaurant and beverage department.

Bridget Smith, 24, a native of Jamaica, emphasizes that "a manager has to know how to deal with people." The on-the-job training provides an opportunity to learn how to deal with staff as well as guests, she stresses.

Llowyn R. Clark, a 20-year old junior from Chicago, echoes Smith's assessment of the internship, noting that the training helps promote good management-employee relations. "I think you can understand what a person goes through when you have had his or her experience."

The objective of the program is to expose the intern to the various functional areas of a hotel through on-the-job training," says Avor. "The process will not only augment the intern's theoretical knowledge, but also provide him or her with the invaluable knowledge of application."

The internship program began a few days before a contract between Howard University and the Marriott Corp. went into effect, May 19th, calling on the Bethesda, Maryland-based hotel and food service chain to provide management and training assistance at the hotel.

Under terms of the contract, Marriott will work with the Howard business school in providing professional hotel management training for the students.

Bob Hill, a Marriott manager for 15 years who is serving as general manager of the university's hotel, emphasizes that he is committed to making a meaningful experience for the students at the inn. "The students fulfill the promise of this hotel," he says.

Howard purchased the hotel in 1981 from the U.S. Economic Development Administration. "The

hotel industry is a growth industry, and we feel we must provide our students with the skills and knowledge that will enable them to obtain employment and embark on new careers," says Howard President James E. Cheek.

Thus far, about 100 students have taken the introductory course in the hotel management curriculum, with 27 declaring a major in the program. An enrollment of more than 200 students is expected by 1987.

Clad in waiter's apparel, 20-year old intern Kenneth James, a junior hotel student from Arlington, Virginia, has his sights set on a number of hospitality career options. He aspires to becoming a general manager or a food and beverage director at a major hotel. But his underlying goal is to start a catering service, a restaurant or a hotel someday.

While taking reservations at the Howard University Inn's front desk, another junior, Erin Nettles of Mobile, Alabama, indicates that there is a certain glamour and excitement in the hotel business. "Since I've been here (at Howard's hotel), I've seen Rev. and Mrs. Jesse Jackson. Teddy Pendergrass is coming next week."

But she is finding in the internship program that the hotel business requires more than just a pretty smile. She says of the internship: "This is my foundation, this is my start."

Univ. of Portland registration

Fall semester registration at the University of Portland will be held in West Hall from 8 a.m. - 3 p.m., September 5th. Special registration for graduate students will be from 6-7 p.m. Classes begin September 6th.

Courses are offered in the four nationally accredited professional schools of business administration, education, engineering and nursing, as well as the arts and sciences. Call the registrar's office at 283-7321 for more information.



Bridget Smith receives a hand from Frank Levy, hotel food manager.
(Photo: Marvin T. Jones)

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